R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 015 950 TE 500 049

LANGUAGE STUDY AS A PART OF FRESHMAN ENGLISH.

BY- FOSCUE, VIRGINIA

PUB DATE 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.32 6P.

DESCRIPTORS- *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *APPLIED LINGUISTICS, *COMPOSITION (LITERARY), *COLLEGE FRESHMEN, *TEACHING TECHNIQUES, TEACHER EDUCATION, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, WRITTEN LANGUAGE, COLLEGE TEACHERS, COMPOSITION SKILLS (LITERARY), LITERATURE, WRITING SKILLS, LINGUISTIC PATTERNS, EXPERIMENTAL TEACHING, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA,

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, TEACHERS USE INSTRUCTION IN LANGUAGE AS THE BASIS FOR INSTRUCTION IN COMPOSITION AND LITERATURE. FOLLOWING THE PRINCIPLES OF FRANCIS CHRISTENSEN, THE TEACHERS CONCENTRATE FIRST ON THE WRITING OF SENTENCES, THEN ON WRITING PARAGRAPHS. THE FINAL WRITING AND STUDY OF WHOLE THEMES ILLUSTRATE THAT THE DEVICES WHICH CONTROL STRUCTURE WITHIN THE PARAGRAPH ALSO CONTROL THE STRUCTURE OF AN ENTIRE COMPOSITION. DURING THE SECOND SEMESTER THE STUDENT'S ATTENTION IS DIRECTED TO THE USES OF LANGUAGE ELEMENTS IN LITERATURE AND TO THE MEANING ACHIEVED WITHIN A FORM. ONE TEACHING TECHNIQUE AMONG SEVERAL USED IS THE "DISCOVERY METHOD" AS DEFINED BY NEIL POSTMAN AND CHARLES WEINGARTNER. (BN)

ED015950

LANGUAGE STUDY AS A PART OF FRESHMAN ENGLISH

1967

For three years at the main campus of the University of Alabama we have used a language reader in the first semester composition course for average freshmen. Our assumption has been that we are better prepared to teach the principles of language and literature than those of such subjects as psychology, political science, sociology, or philosophy. Our purpose in using the reader has been to help our students become observers of real language in actual use, which we feel is the only lasting way to make them better users of language.

While a number of instructors during the past two years have experimented with ways to relate the instruction in language to that in composition and literature, this year we are trying to help all instructors of the regular freshman English course integrate these three subjects of the English curriculum. By using language as the base for all instruction in English, we are trying to do more than point out the interrelationships between the three subjects and assign compositions to deal with the materials of the other two areas. As Francis Christensen has stated, until he built a modern rhetoric of the sentence on the foundation of modern grammar, we had a

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

TE 500 049

fairly useful analysis of the larger elements of writing, but we had none of the basic unit--the sentence--where grammar, composition, and rhetoric meet. Mr. Christensen says that

> thorough training in the grammar and rhetoric of the sentence would put the teaching of both writing and reading, both composition and literature, on a more solid foundation than the sandy ones they now tremble on. We have classes full of students who want to do "something creative" who cannot write a sentence. We try to teach the subtleties of older and modern literature--imagery, symbol, metaphor, irony--to students who can't make out the structure of fairly simple literal sentences. We try to teach the sound qualities of poetry and prose to students who cannot distinguish between letters and phonemes and have no language to discuss either.[1]

At the University of Alabama, we are applying Christensen's principles by first assigning short themes in which we stress the cumulative sentence and particular and accurate diction. Next, we concentrate upon paragraphs which contain clear and adequate lead sentences, the coordinate and/or subordinate designs illustrated in Christensen's models, and particular and accurate diction. Finally, we assign whole themes illustrating the fact that the devices which control structure within the paragraph also control the structure of an entire composition.

While the students are completing these writing assignments, they are reading essays which deal with such subjects as the basic sentence patterns of English and

kinds of diction--the language elements we are stressing in the writing assignments. In addition, the students read essays which we hope will help them acquire attitudes toward language that can be of benefit to them throughout their lives.

The teaching technique that we have found most effective in helping students acquire these attitudes is the discovery method. According to Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner,

> it requires that the burden of intellectual inquiry be carried by the student, not the teacher or textbook. In the case of the English class, it requires that the students try to solve problems not unlike those that linguists must solve. In other words, it requires that students become involved in processes of defining, question asking, data gathering, observing, classifying, generalizing, and verifying in matters of language. It implies that the students play an important role in determining what lines of inquiry are worth pursuing and a pre-eminent role in determining what arguments and conclusions are worth embracing.
>
> In addition to conventional functions, such as evaluating student achievement, the function of the teacher is twofold: First, to insure that students will engage seriously in processes of inquiry by immersing them in an atmosphere of relevance; second, to guide the inquiries that the students make....
>
> The discovery method of teaching is indifferent to specific doctrines. Its emphasis is on <u>how</u> students do their thinking, not on the indoctrination of particular thoughts.[2]

In English 2 we try to build upon the foundation laid in English 1. Where in English 1 we emphasize form

as pattern or design, in English 2 we emphasize meaning achieved within that form. Our concern is with questions of rhetorical strategy, with the analysis of problems, the development of arguments, the skillful use of evidence; that is, how to make form most effectively serve the ends of thoughtful communication. However, before our students begin using these techniques in writing criticism of poetry, drama, and fiction, we introduce them to the sound and intonation systems of English so that they will be equipped to describe sound and rhythm accurately.

A technique which one of our teaching assistants, Marvin Weaver, and others of our staff have found useful in helping students to understand poetry, is an application of certain principles of transformational-generative grammar to an analysis of syntax. Mr. Weaver directs his students to identify the stylistic contexts of the poem, which are linguistic patterns broken by unpredictable elements. After the students identify such stylistic items as left-branching, right-branching, or self-embedding surface structures; inversions; shifts in tense; and lengths of sentences, they then try to determine what these devices contribute to the total effect of the poem.

Other instructors have successfully applied this same technique to the analysis of prose written by professionals and by students. With this, as with the other techniques

I have described, the purpose is to help the students become aware of the choices available to them so that they can select the ones most appropriate for their own uses of language.

Now, obviously, the success of an English program such as ours, in which instruction in language is integrated with that in composition and literature, depends upon the training, experience, and enthusiasm of the instructors. Since many of our teaching assistants lack training and experience, we attempt to help them by providing in-service training and by assigning experienced instructors to advise them. Though we do not yet know how successful our experiment with this kind of program will be, most of us are enthusiastic and are striving to improve instruction in all three areas of the English curriculum.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Francis Christensen, "The Child's Right to a Teacher Who Knows," The English Language in the School Program, ed. Robert F. Hogan (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1966), p. 278.

[2]Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, Linguistics: A Revolution in Teaching (New York, N.Y.: Dell Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 37-38.

Virginia Foscue

University of Alabama

[1967]